

An interview with Kari Patterson, Author of *Sacred Mundane*



Many women feel trapped in everyday drudgery and disappointment, in dull domestic duties and jobs that don't offer fulfillment. The mundane day-in, day-out life seems like a far cry from the abundant, purposeful life they envisioned as Christians. In *Sacred Mundane: How to Find Freedom, Purpose, and Joy* (Kregel Publications), author and blogger Kari Patterson helps readers find freedom, purpose and joy in the life they are living right now.

Q: The word "mundane" usually has a negative connotation. How do you define mundane?

Mundane refers to the ordinary, everyday, commonplace, unexciting stuff of life. Yes, it does usually have a negative connotation, and that's the point! We tend to devalue and despise the mundane, but that is where our transformation takes place. When we overlook this area, we miss the greatest catalyst for effecting true change in our lives. For Naaman, the Jordan River had negative connotations, which was why God led him to dip down into those waters. It is precisely the waters we most want to avoid where our transformation is found.

Q: Explain the life-sentence exercise you ask your readers to do in the introduction of *Sacred Mundane*.

In 2 Kings, we read, "Naaman was a mighty man of valor, but he was a leper." He had so much going for him, but his leprosy threatened to steal it all. I ask readers to consider their own lives and prayerfully simmer down their own life into a sentence. We all have so much going for us; we are made in the image of God with gifts, skills, relationships, abilities, potential . . . *but* there's something that limits, hinders, robs, and binds us, and in quiet, prayerful moments it will likely come to the surface. There's something we just can't kick. So often we're vaguely aware of the areas we want to change, but we don't take the time to narrow down and identify the one thing that most hinders us. We feel overwhelmed or discouraged. Identifying the one thing helps us see more clearly how God wants to use our mundane to make us more like Him.

Q: You write we all have something that limits our freedom, confuses our purpose, and steals our joy that we try to hide from others yet it continues to grow. How do we identify what that thing is and remove it from our lives?

The good news is that God wants us free even more than we do. As we sit quietly before Him and genuinely desire to hear from Him, He will show us. We could also ask a close friend, spouse, or someone who truly loves us, "What one thing do you see keeping me from being all God created me to be?" I find it helpful to think of it not as something that's "wrong with us," but simply something that's keeping us from being all God made us to be. It wasn't Naaman's fault he had leprosy. Some of our hang-ups are the result of our poor choices, some are a result of what others have done to us, and some are just the consequences of living in a fallen world. The point isn't to determine whose "fault" it is or to shame us for our weakness or issue, but to find wholeness, freedom, joy.

Q: How does desperation lead to transformation?

Change is hard, but it happens when the discomfort of our problem exceeds the discomfort of changing. When we are finally sick to death of a situation, when we've had it with this struggle, that's when we really seek change. In recovery circles, we would call it "rock bottom" — we each have to reach rock bottom in our situation before we are truly ready to change. My hope is readers have reached their rock bottom or find it in reading the book and become ready to do whatever it takes to let God change their lives.

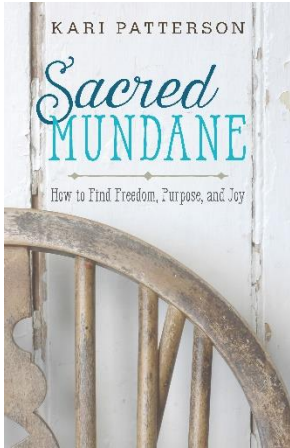
Q: Why is it sometimes unsettling to let God into our lives when He is right outside, knocking on the door?

It's unsettling because it means letting go of control. Our greatest temptation will always be to want to rule our own lives, to be our own God, and to do it our way. However, God loves us too much to let us do that because He knows we'll do a terrible job. We aren't God, and we were never meant to be. He's the only One who can handle the weight of that responsibility, so He patiently knocks and waits for us to let Him in. We're hesitant

because of fear and not wanting to give up control. We forget how good He is and how He always is working for our good . . . if only we could trust Him more.

Q: When you were in college, you were on fire for God, yet miserable at the same time. Why were you so unhappy during this period of time?

Life was so very ordinary and full of disappointment. The man I loved had just broken my heart and told me we would never be together (we are now married), my job was full of mundane, tedious tasks, my relationships, especially with my roommate, included the usual conflict and awkwardness, plus I had the challenges of leading 400 college students. I hadn't yet learned all of life — even the struggling, frustration, irritating, disappointing parts — were part of my sacred offering to God. I genuinely wanted to please God, so it was life-changing for me to realize I could please Him simply by offering up every ordinary day as a sacrifice of praise to Him. Hebrews 13:15 says through Jesus' sacrifice of atonement we can offer our sacrifice of praise.



Q: What is the first of six steps to move forward and meet God in the humdrum moments of everyday existence?

The first step is to look. Most importantly of all, we must learn to use the Scriptures as a lens through which we see every situation. Until we see as God sees, nothing will make sense. We will go through life stumbling and fumbling until we learn to see all things through the truth of God's Word. In my opinion, this is the biggest deficiency in the American church. We don't know God's Word. We're shallow. We go through the motions of religiosity and church attendance, but we don't truly know the Word of God and let it soak into our souls and permeate every part of our being. God's Word isn't the end all — He is — but it is through the Scriptures we learn to see as He sees.

Q: Can you share your simple approach to scripture and reading the Bible?

Look *through* the Word to see everything else. As we study the Scriptures every day, we don't evaluate them, standing over them as a judge; we receive them. That is, we don't overly concern ourselves with some big, new revelation no one has seen before. We don't have to know Greek or Hebrew or do the latest Bible study. We simply need to sit like a child at His feet, opening up God's Word and determining we will do whatever we read, no matter what. Our aptitude for the Word matters less than our attitude toward the Word.

Q: On your blog (also named Sacred Mundane), you wrote, "Several years ago God wrecked us for 'normal,' and we started doing weird stuff." What exactly did you and your husband start doing?

By nature, I am very introverted. I like my space, my stuff, and my organized, controlled, neat, and tidy life. I wanted a secure retirement account, a successful writing career, security, and other things like that. In 2010, my husband and I read *The Hole in our Gospel*, and God completely turned our world upside down. Even though we'd "known" these things, we'd never *really* known them.

We began seeing the kingdom of God is all about giving away, taking the low seat, preferring others, and storing up treasure in heaven. We sold our dream home and moved to "the other side of the tracks" into a dumpy little rental to plant a church in a lower-income area. We opened up our home and started living in community. We became involved with those coming out of alcohol addiction and even had some ladies live with us who were coming out of homelessness and addiction. For a few years we gave half our income away, and I will be giving away 100% of my proceeds from this book.

None of this is spectacular — lots of people are doing the same — but from the world's perspective, it's weird. In fact, our local TV news did a story on our downsize and our commitment to frugality because it seemed strange. Apparently following Jesus is weird to the world! Why would you give half your income away? Why would you downsize unless you had to? Why would you let unsavory people into your home? Because Jesus is awesome, and we finally saw the value in investing in the Kingdom more than in our own little temporal kingdom here on earth.

Q: How do we listen to and discern God's voice in our daily life?

First by getting into the Scripture so we know what He sounds like. I know the sound of my husband's tires on the gravel outside our house. How do I know? It's a different tires-on-gravel sound than any other car, and I've heard it so many times that I've learned to discern it throughout time. There are a lot of voices out there: the world, the enemy, my own thoughts and emotions. The only way to discern what God's voice sounds like is to practice listening and see if it lines up with the Word of God. The more time we spend in the Word, sit quietly and listen in prayer, obey what we hear, and take steps of faith to do anything He asks of us, the more we increase our ability to hear from Him.

Q: Step three in the process is engaging. How exactly do you engage with God in the monotony of life?

At any given moment throughout my day, I have the choice whether I will engage and enter in or draw back, escape, and check out. We can do this in many ways: by ignoring a difficult situation, avoiding conflict, not dealing with a child who needs discipline, getting on my phone and mindlessly scrolling through social media, sitting and vegging in front of my TV shows, eating, shopping, or staying so busy I don't have to deal with hard things. But when we stop, slow down, and engage, we step into the hard, mundane, and ordinary moment. We learn to commune with God in the midst of it, asking Him how He wants us to respond to any given situation. We have an opportunity to see Him in the midst of the ordinary, but not if we're checked out on our phones.

Q: Why is the mundane so sacred, and how can we learn to embrace it?

The mundane is sacred because that's where we *live*. It's the majority of our lives. Sure, we have some mountaintop experiences. We have vacations and high moments; we have wedding days and exhilarating experiences. But the vast majority of our lives is spent in the midst of ordinary days, so *that* is why it's so sacred — because it's where we live, it's where God is, dwelling inside us by His Spirit. It's where our guard is down, and we're not performing; we're just our raw and real selves, doing our raw and real thing, and that is where God meets us and makes us more like Him.

Q: Who did God put into your life to teach you about loving people? What did you learn from opening the door and letting her in?

God placed a young woman on our doorstep who was homeless, addicted to drugs, and struggling with severe mental illness and PTSD from abuse. I let her in, and she lived with us for a time. I learned loving people is messy, and we don't always do it perfect. However, that isn't the point. I also discovered addiction and homelessness are complex issues. Most importantly, I learned the only answer is the gospel and about the love and accountability of gospel community through the Church. People can never become projects, and loving others always includes a cost. Jesus paid the greatest cost ever out of love for us, and He calls us to love others in that same generous, selfless, costly way.

Q: Why is it hard for us to trust God and His plans for us?

It's hard to trust God's plan for us because we can't see the end! We are control freaks, especially in this culture where we have (or think we have) so much perceived control. For example, most of us aren't farmers with huge variations in crops from year to year. Instead, we get a regular paycheck, often a fixed salary, and have five-year plans, big buffers on our savings accounts. We have climate control in our homes and cars and have gates and locks on our doors. We like to make our own plans so we feel in control. Trusting God is hard because He usually doesn't give us much advanced notice. In fact, He often makes it look as if everything is disastrous before He swoops in and fulfills His promises. He does this so our faith, more precious than gold, will be tested and found pure. He knows the greatest joy, peace, and transformation happens when we learn to quit trying to be God and let Him be all.

Q: What is the final step of discovering God in the mundane?

The sixth step is to thank, and that's most certainly the culmination of the Godward, worshipful life. We all know we're supposed to be thankful, and perhaps we've written gift lists and tried to count our blessings. Still we struggle with this nagging feeling of disappointment and frustration. Often we think if we're truly spiritual or if we're good Christians, then we won't feel disappointment. We sing, "You're never gonna let me down," but if we're honest, we often feel disappointed and let down by God. What do we do with that disappointment? In this chapter we discuss two cycles, the disappointment cycle and the fulfillment cycle, and look at the

difference between expectancy and expectation. We look at the lives of seven godly men and women in the Scriptures who all experienced profound disappointment as part of God's glorious plan for their lives. Here we learn the secret to seeing God's fulfillment, learn to cast aside our flimsy handmade expectations, and learn to squint the eyes of our souls to see God in the darkness.

Then we finish our time together in the book by emphasizing the importance of letting our lives be poured out in worship to God for the sake of others. Transformation is really all about bearing fruit, and fruit was meant to be picked. The purpose of fruit is not to preen. Trees don't take selfies of their fruit. The purpose of fruit is to nourish others by the beauty and nutrients. When our lives are transformed, the world is blessed. Sadly, we often divorce these two aspects of the Christian life — sanctification and mission. I'd insist they are one and the same. As we are sanctified, we are more effective in carrying out the mission of God, and as we carry out the mission of God, we are sanctified, made more like Christ. This book isn't about naval-gazing, self-focus, or being all we were meant to be simply for the purpose of looking better. The point is freedom, purpose, and joy, for the glory of God and the good of the world. The point is to display the goodness and glory of God to a world in desperate need of His hope. That's the point.

Q: Tell us more about the nine-session small-group Bible study included in the book.

The Bible study can be used by individuals or as a group study. It is great for a summer book club, meeting informally in someone's living room, or a church's women's weekly Bible study (large or small). All that's needed is included in the book, so it's ideal for a low-cost, easy-to-facilitate, nine-week study.

Learn more about *Sacred Mundane* and read Patterson's *Sacred Mundane* blog at www.karipatterson.com. She is also active on [Facebook](#) ([sacredmundane](#)) and [Twitter](#) ([@sacredmundane](#)).